

From a Career Bet to a Working Mother

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Exactly one year ago, I handed CHF 500 to my brother – the amount we had agreed upon in a bet 16 years ago. Back then, I was firmly convinced that children wouldn't be part of my life plan because I wanted to focus entirely on my career. My brother, however, was certain: *"One day, you'll have children."* He was right. Four months ago, our son was born healthy, and I gladly lost that bet.

Reflecting on this journey, I realize that growing up in a small village strongly shaped my early beliefs. I was surrounded by the notion that family and career were difficult, if not impossible, for women to reconcile. However, my own experiences – both within my family, where my mother always worked, and in my professional life – have proven otherwise. Today, I am a happy mother who continues to pursue her professional goals, confident that both are not only possible but can enrich each other.

This shift in perspective was shaped by two key factors:

Firstly, I have realized how crucial a supportive work environment is for balancing family and career. Flexible working hours, team support, practical measures like providing time for breast-feeding, and a positive attitude toward employees with children are essential. These are areas I wish to see prioritized in my own workplace when I return – because without such support, balancing both roles becomes unnecessarily challenging. If these structures are not in place, it may mean seeking an employer who truly values and supports working parents.



Secondly, I have learned how deeply ingrained societal expectations still are. When I shared that I planned to return to work at 80–100%, many people – both men and women – reacted with surprise: *“That’s a lot.”* Interestingly, this is a question men rarely face. No one asks a man how much he plans to work after having a child; it’s simply assumed that he’ll return full-time. Women, however, often encounter additional, discouraging comments like: *“Let’s see if you come back to work at all.”* I think this is a comment a man has never heard in his life.

My partner and I, however, approached this differently. From the very beginning, it was clear that he would support me in whatever decision I made. For him, we are equal partners, sharing responsibilities equally – both at home and in our careers.

One example of this shared responsibility is his 12-week paternity leave, which was a tremendous gift for our family and vital for me personally. After the birth, I lost 2 liters of blood – nearly a third of my body’s blood volume – and it took four weeks to regain my energy. During this time, my partner’s support was invaluable as we adjusted to parenthood together. This time highlighted the importance of a man’s support for a woman after childbirth, allowing her to recover from the physical and emotional challenges, while also navigating the rollercoaster of hormonal changes. For us, it was a gift. However, I hope that in the future, such support will no longer be seen as a gift but as a normal part of parenthood.

Looking ahead, our shared approach to balancing work and family continues. In January, when I return to work, my partner will take a month off to manage our son's "Kita Eingewöhnung" (child-care adjustment period) and care for him full-time. After this, we plan to share responsibilities equally, aiming for a true 50:50 split in raising our son and pursuing our careers.

My journey has taught me that being a mother and pursuing professional goals simultaneously is achievable – but only with the right support structures. Here are three critical areas where change is needed to enable others to do the same:

1. More support and encouragement from companies:

Flexible working arrangements, generous parental leave policies, and a company culture that values the needs of working parents are essential. Importantly, this culture must not only be written on paper but also lived in practice. Women and men should have equal opportunities to combine family and career without compromise.

2. Active involvement of partners:

Men play a pivotal role in advancing equality – not only in the workplace but also at home. I would like to see more men taking on family responsibilities and actively supporting their partners' professional ambitions.

3. Challenging societal norms:

It is time to shift the narrative that only women are primarily responsible for balancing family and work. Partners should share responsibilities equally, and women should feel empowered to pursue their professional goals without facing undue judgment or scrutiny.

Today, I look forward to the challenges ahead with optimism. Returning to work in February will be the next step on this exciting journey – learning to balance my professional ambitions with my role as a mother. While it won't always be easy, I am confident that family and career are not mutually exclusive but can beautifully complement one another, enriching both my personal and professional life.

I encourage everyone – individuals, organizations, and society at large – to take steps toward fostering a world where family and career can thrive together.

About the Author

Fabienne Bezemer has over 9 years of experience in HR consulting, with a strong focus on executive search and recruiting, as well as expertise in performance management and compensation management. Her professional background also includes board advisory services, assessments, change management, and corporate transformation. Fabienne is committed to driving organizational success by identifying top leadership talent and aligning HR strategies with business objectives.

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